BOOK REVIEW

LET SHEPHERDING ENDURE: APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PRESERVATION OF A CULTURAL TRADITION IN ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST BY G.M. KRESSEL

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This book is about pastoralists living in the Middle East both Arab Bedouins and Jews. How they live in campsites and on Kibbutz wandering around with their herds? The author begins by narrating his childhood experiences living in such campsites. In 1951–1952, he was a young shepherd at Kibbutz Giv'at Brenner, and how he came back from the school in the afternoons preparing sheep pens for the return of the herd from pasture and helped with the milking.

Though he moved away, but during the next coming years and decades he continued to come across Bedouin herds as part of his field research. During the years 1967–1972, he came across the herds in the course of field research, he undertook on Bedouin settlers and their herds in the Ramle/Lod area. As mentioned earlier, he had a long time experience with the herders continuing his research for decades. Beginning in the spring of 1996 and continuing on and off until the 2000s, he has been engaged with shepherding problems in the Palestinian Authority, Tunis, Egypt, Jordan, and Israel. Originally, his major academic involvement as an anthropologist has been with the Bedouin in Israel.

He examined the crucial problems confronting present-day livestock breeders, principally Bedouin and Jews in Israel, but also pastoral nomads in neighboring Middle Eastern countries. In this book Let Shepherding Endure he proposes new ways for the governments to enhance and sustain the long-term future development of shepherding communities. Adopting a broad historical and anthropological perspective on the topic, and assessing various pastoral relief programs, Kressel suggests an alternative program through which the region’s states can promote a brand of pastoralism that preserves rangeland herding while keeping in step with the contemporary cultural and political context. This truly visionary set of recommendations would have several dividends, especially for the Bedouin: their cultural legacy, in danger of obsolescence, would be preserved while at the same time enhancing both their pastoral skills and ability to secure a livelihood from herding.

The book has been divided into the total number of nine contents. First, he explains the migrations from a pan-human perspective of dominance and control, rather than specifically one of animal husbandry. This perspective explains the three dimensional relationship obtaining between nomadic pastoralists, agriculturalists, and the State throughout historic times until recent decades. Through years, the balance of power wielded by the three parties often shifted, with the pastoralists or organs of the State sometimes gaining the upper hand. Three main phases can be discerned in the varying magnitude of the State’s dominance: (1) a totally weak State; (2) a middle position in which the State is neither weak nor strong; and (3) a strong State. This third and last phase has, for instance, prevailed in Egypt and most of the Levant since the nineteenth century.
He explains how power dynamics continued to shift through migrations and the recent historical data related to migration. The shifts in power dynamics were also due to changes in land usage by the Negev Bedouin since the Mid-Nineteenth century. The major factors have influenced the transition of Bedouin from nomadic pastoralism to agriculture in the Middle East. Two of these are exogenous and have acted as catalysts for change: the rising economic, political, and military power of the states in the area, which compelled the Bedouin either to settle under new conditions, offering greater security to farming activities, or to vacate, and the ongoing trend among nomadic shepherds of purchasing holdings on the edge of settled lands, where life offers many comforts in comparison with the meager subsistence of lone shepherding.

He also analyzed land transactions and conducted population surveys. Following factors have been helpful in this accord:
1. juridical readjustments relating to the use of land over the past hundred years, as traditional tribal rights come into conflict with the modern system of private rights, and common grazing territory is apportioned in the form of private plots for cultivation; and
2. the concomitant influx of capital, labor (mostly of fallâ‘ origin) and agricultural know-how to the Negev; and the impact of the new entrepreneurial leadership on traditional leadership, realignment of groupings, readjustments of social hierarchy, restructured channels of social mobility, and so on.

Kressel also mentions the economic, demographic, and external political reasons behind the expansion of cultivated land in the Negev from the end of the Ottoman period until the end of the Mandate period. First, the increase in investment capital that came into Bedouin hands, from (in chronological order) the Ottomans and Germans (who together built Be‘er-Sheva and laid railroad tracks to Egypt), the British (who erected army camps, paved roads in the Negev and laid different railroad tracks to Egypt after the earlier ones were destroyed), and

the Zionists, who allowed the Bedouin to supply themselves with seedlings and tools, and stimulated technological advancement.

Second, the continued migration toward the interior and the growing population density, due to which a greater number of laborers were available, and pressure mounted to determine ownership of the plots. And finally the 1948 war, which led to a thinning out of the Negev tribes.

Several solutions provided by Yitzhak’s Government to improve Bedouin’s economy included: setting up settlements for pastoralists to solve their pressing problems, Improving the desert flora for use as forage for the Bedouin herds, the development of Bedouin townships in the Negev as opposed to houses in dispersed dwellings (such as tents and shacks), existing guidelines and alternative plans for the future of the Negev Bedouin community, incorporating directions proposed by the Bedouin themselves, currents of change in Israeli governmental policy beginning with Yitzhak Rabin’s government in 1992.

However Kressel presents some views for the ensured improvement in Bedouin community i.e. renovations in land ownership, changes in official policy towards Bedouin as their affairs until now were dealt by Minhal and Security forces who assigned several lands for multiple purposes like pipeline and Bedouin are now considered trespassing as they move through there, and finally the judicial authority should be reconsidered as Bedouin cannot file a case against treatment from Minhal and Security forces.

“The officials of state organs, wearing the cloak of the civil services, have the law on their side and have the means at their disposal to detect delinquent citizens.”

Kressel turns our attention further towards the Government policy and states that a modernized version of Bedouin settlement in desert areas is in the interest of the Middle Eastern states, including Israel. Unfortunately the countries involved do not notice the validity of this view
and most of the governments prefer to leave the Bedouin on their own in raw conditions. The most suitable option seems to the Bedouin is to give up herding, abandon the desert lands, and settle in tents or shacks on the periphery of towns. Urbanization of the Bedouin usually begins unknowingly and continues to increase as the feasibility of stock-breeding decreases for those living in the deep desert regions. Bedouin who move to town seek modern ways of earning a living, and when they find them hard to attend, they engage in such delinquent occupations including smuggling and illicit trade. Indifference towards the hardship of the Bedouin on the part of governments throughout the Middle East seems to be due to several reasons: the Bedouins’ declining power, their ability to harm sedentary through so-called “illegal activities”, such as grazing their herds in fields and orchards. Other reasons are that the peoples of the Middle East are unable to free themselves of their historical fear of them, their inability, because of long-standing tribal divisions, to organize a lobby demanding their rights and better living conditions. And finally the fear that Bedouin is known for their ability to topple the social order of settled communities. The way the land is monitored between Advisor, Consultant and Counselor is also a hindrance to achieve improvement for Bedouin. An adviser is an expert in an area important to the Minhal, who will offer his/her best advice free of charge. A consultant is also an expert in an area important to the Minhal, who, as a “licensed businessperson,” offers his/her recommendations for a fee, according to the Minhal’s means or willingness to pay. A counselor is an expert in a particular domain who, as part of the state civil service apparatus, makes recommendations to his department in return for a salary, indirect benefits, or both. Due to such bureaucratic systems it becomes really difficult to implement Bedouin favoring Government policies.

It is difficult to say what interests dictate the policy of the Israeli government. In the State’s dealings with the Negev Bedouin, three types of ministry officials Enhancing the Attractiveness of Shepherding 105 handle Bedouin affairs: the bureaucrat, the party man, and, the opportunist. All these are elements of Jewish nationalism which challenge Arab nationalism. Proper administration to deal with a semi-nomadic population, which does not move from place to place in the open areas, requires the preparation of the new civil agenda. It is in the public interest to raise the standard of living and the quality of life of Bedouin citizens of the State of Israel, by enabling them to move to modern houses. But if the move to townships causes a decline in the Bedouins’ standard of living and quality of life as compared to their previous situation, particularly because of lack of jobs, then it clearly diminishes the Bedouin desire to collaborate. The distribution of State’s budget shall be considered as Pressure groups fight for a larger share of the budget, while the Bedouin “sector” has not benefited from it at all. On the contrary, it has always been possible to save at its expense in favor of appropriations to more demanding social groups. The Jewish-Arab dispute over the land tends to silent down the protests of the Bedouin, unless they be judged defiant. In Israel, whereas several Bedouin towns have been planned and built, villages have not yet attracted attention as a topic for design and planning. Plans for new settlements in arid lands are being prepared in various parts of the Middle East, but these settlements tend not to be specifically designed for accommodating pastoralists, nor are they visualized to promote the occupation of herding in particular. Thus the immediate objective of new development projects is to integrate the Bedouin into the national fabric and to improve the group’s socioeconomic conditions by replacing their original skills with new agricultural skills.
Bedouin villages will be built of concrete and of modern design ensuring standards of comfort equal to those in the existing Bedouin townships. The homes in the future village will be connected to the electricity grid and be equipped with running water. Tracks for sheep and goats should lead from each house to the nearby hill slopes, on which the development of agroforestry is projected. The layout of the village should consist of an ellipse or a circle. At present, the consensus is that the village should be open to non-livestock-raising families who support themselves from other sources. Development plots for herding should not, however, be given to non-shepherds. Plots for a house, with sufficient space for a workshop at the rear, will be available to families not planning to raise livestock.

There are several guidelines for how this future village will be designed. The initial number of families in the village will be eighty. The village will be designated for shepherds, but possession of livestock is not a precondition for acceptance into it. The state will help out with supplies of animal feed during seasonal deficiencies of grazing plots. Homes should be precisely constructed with a maximum of two storeys so that to give the appearance of a rural community, and to allow moderate winds to blow through the village center. The school, health clinic, and community center will be on a regional scale (serving several neighboring villages) to guarantee quality. Families are expected to use their own means of transportation to reach the regional center. A mosque, a kindergarten, and a meeting space for elders would form the village core. The village should be situated on gentle rocky hill slopes, not on the arable flat area below, which is reserved for cultivation.

Kressel finally mentions how the State has given the herders to observe urf their customary laws and that State has also given Bedouin their right of representation when dealing with their affairs. A major reason for the decline in shepherding in the Middle East and in Israel, in particular, is modern economic development (mostly petroleum-stimulated growth). The countries of this region can now supply their needs and purchase goods abroad. Therefore, traditional branches of enterprise, such as shepherding, which only provide a modest source of income are neglected. This reason for the decline has yet to receive due attention, like range destruction due to drought and overgrazing, and the migration of herdsmen from the desert to the towns.

Nearly all the Bedouin in the Galilee and more than half of the Negev Bedouin dwell in the townships, in concrete homes. The most Bedouin in the Middle East no longer wish to return to their situation of a century ago, but rather opt for the comforts of urban life.

One can contend that nomadic society is transitional i.e. in constant evolution toward a settled existence. Bedouin can thus always be visualized as a group seeking incentives to settle. One must consider the advantages of monitored shepherding for Bedouin herd and for the environment and agroforestry development projects. We note that the more limited grazing patterns resulting from farm-based herds will leave wide areas of untouched rangeland. Even when animals are sometimes taken in a vehicle to the more remote areas to graze, in the long run, this will entail neglect of a major asset i.e. the natural range. Forest terraces, designed to slow down the run-off water so that it will reach the roots of plants, require large-scale infrastructure works that tribes of former herdsmen or, especially, a single herding family cannot afford. It is up to states and NGOs to carry out this work, rendering agroforestry viable.

Small (family) herds with very limited movements will reduce political functions of the tribes one of which was to defend affiliated families’ livestock property. On the positive side, as regards the sustainability of the dîra range, the tribe maintains the joint concern in keeping its rejuvenation potential. Without the tribal focus of control, investments, including forage
production, would be at risk. Family herds grazing locally are liable to exacerbate the problems of overgrazing. The general public, led by the State, must take the initiative to supply drinking water, thus rendering possible sustenance of village life in arid zones inhabited by herders and their herds. The State must take the initiative and supply the required drinking water, because this is an undertaking too large for individual or concerted (tribal) initiatives. The state organs are called upon to increase involvement by reclaiming ruined rangelands and lending a helping hand to communities of in situ pastoralists. Overall, the book is highly informative as it can be utilized to reflect upon our own pastoral communities here in Pakistan, particularly in Baluchistan and South Punjab, where such small communities are under constant threat from both sedentary population of agrarian and Government policies. The book provides a map to sort out hindrances and difficulties for such population and to devise a solution for not only helping them from assimilation but also to develop them in their own right.

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